

SPORT



THE BEGINNING OF THE ROT: Bangladesh collapsed in a heap after left-handed opener Soumya Sarkar was clean bowled by Asela Gunaratne off the second ball on the fifth day of the opening Test against Sri Lanka at Galle yesterday. The visitors suffered a humiliating 259-run defeat.

PHOTO: AFP

A question of practice

SAKEB SUBHAN from Galle

Bangladesh's fans, let alone the players, must be sick of the feeling of deja vu when the fifth day of a Test comes along. Yesterday after resuming on 67 without loss, Bangladesh folded for 197 in chase of 457 or a more realistic 98 overs to bat out on the fifth day on an unusually benign Galle International Cricket Stadium wicket.

This season, starting from Wellington, through Christchurch and Hyderabad and now Galle, batting collapses when draws were imminently possible has left them defeated and looking like newcomers to Test cricket ahead of their 100th Test on March 15. When mistakes are repeated this often, what does it say about the processes that get the players out onto the field of play to compete on a level with their opponents?

Even more troubling for Bangladesh is that the deja vu is not limited to the results, but extends to the dismissals, of which there were five in the first hour. Soumya Sarkar may as well have gotten out to the first ball -- his sweep that looped over short leg was as irresponsible as his first-innings pull shot to the first ball of pace he had faced that day -- but his dismissal next ball, bowled by a slow-medium, part-time off-spinner brings to mind his deficiencies against movement of any kind. Mominul Haque got out in exactly the same fashion as he did in the first innings, playing back to an off-spinner pitching the ball up. Mahmudullah Riyad, it now appears, has trouble getting in line to the spinners as well as pacers. Liton Das again played an airy shot when more circumspection was required.

"I hope that we can become mentally stronger and more disciplined in practice," said a glum Mushfiqur after the match. "By discipline what I mean is when we do [our]

nets [sessions] according to match situations, to become more disciplined as a team."

Tamim in the first innings did not know where the ball was and made a run for it, but he said later that he had nicked the ball which, having nestled in the keeper's gloves, enabled the run-out. Shakib chased a ball down the leg side off Lakshan Sandakan and was caught behind. Yesterday, Mushfiqur did the same against the same bowler.

"I still believe Shakib's dismissal in the first innings was unlucky," said Mushfiqur. "And my dismissal today too... I saw that there was no leg slip, no short fine leg, so if I don't try to play that ball and score runs, which ball will I score runs off?"

By the time Mushfiqur played that shot, it may already have been too late. But it is a



little puzzling when the team's best and most responsible batsman and one who played an innings of high Test pedigree in the first innings asks that question which betrays an ODI mindset, something that Mushfiqur clearly does not suffer from but may be present elsewhere in the team.

One is left to wonder whether leaving deliveries down the leg side when that mode of dismissal has been a recurring one is a match situation to work on or adapt to over the course of five days. Another match situation to work on in the nets would probably be batting long enough to save a Test. With the average dismissal yesterday taking 18.5 minutes, it doesn't seem like that has been on the agenda.

'Lack of application disheartening'

SPORTS REPORTER from Galle

It is growing a little too familiar for comfort for Bangladesh skipper Mushfiqur Rahim. For the last four overseas Test, with the most recent being the 259-run walloping at the hands of Sri Lanka in Galle yesterday, the Bangladesh skipper has had to face the press following a turnaround for the worse on the fifth day.

Even so, yesterday's inexplicable collapse of five wickets for 37 runs in the first hour and an eventual folding for 197 on a good fifth day pitch at the Galle International Cricket Stadium seemed to have unnerved him.

When asked for positives Mushfiqur genuinely struggled for a few seconds to come up with a response to this press conference staple. He said Soumya Sarkar batted well in both innings, the bowlers performed well and could have executed better on a flat pitch, and added that Tamim played well too.

"I think it's difficult to point out the few positives. I think it's important that we play well as a team, but we couldn't do that. And I think we were outplayed in all three departments, and Sri Lanka deserved to win."

He said the Tigers, with their overnight score of 67 without loss and 98 overs to bat out on the final day in response to Sri Lanka's target of 457, started

the day thinking the match could be salvaged.

"Last night, we had some hope after the way Soumya and Tamim batted. That gave us the confidence that at least if we could survive the first session or hour with minimal loss then we could advance to a draw.

"Unfortunately we couldn't do that. We lost our top five batsmen, after that it's very difficult from there to recover. And when you know that you can't win the game it's a bit difficult. And also they know that they just have to bowl the right line and length," was Mushfiqur's post mortem of the debacle.

For his part, Mushfiqur was frank in his appraisal of his side's shortcomings.

"No matter how good the wicket is or how good the batsman is, it takes only one ball if you are not mentally in the right place, don't have the concentration or application," he answered when asked if the shortcoming was just a matter of basics, as he had said during the course of the press conference, or a matter of application from the batsmen as well.

"In that respect I will say that we were a lot behind, especially on such a good wicket on which they played so easily, especially the way Upul Tharanga scored his hundred in the second innings without facing any problems. So from that viewpoint, the application was a source of disappointment as a captain."

A prime example of the lack of concentration or application was displayed by the batsman

Mushfiqur had singled out as one of the positives. Soumya Sarkar, unbeaten on 53 off 49 overnight, played the most possible shot on the first ball of the morning, going to sweep occasional bowler Asela Gunaratne who started the day because he bowled a no-ball in his first ball the previous evening immediately before bad light stopped play. The ball caught the top edge and ballooned over the short leg fielder. Soumya got out the very next ball as an off-cutter bowled his defensive prod, but the previous shot sent the wrong message.

"It was very disheartening the way he started today because in the first ball if you play a sweep it is very difficult. That applies to any batsman, no matter if you are batting on 100 or 200 overnight. So I think there are a lot of lessons there, not just for him but for the whole team. If some get out to a good ball, that is a different case, but if the application of some is a little different it becomes difficult for the team," said Mushfiqur.

"We don't have a batsman whose average is 50 or 50-plus so that if someone gets out he can cover it. All of us average 35 or 40. So we should take more responsibility so that the six batsmen score the bulk of the runs."

He still held out some hope for the second Test, Bangladesh's 100th, starting at the P Sara Oval in Colombo on March 15.

"We lost the opportunity, but there is one more chance and I hope that as a batting and bowling group we can make a comeback."

BD-SL SCOREBOARD

SRI LANKA: 1st innings 494				
BANGLADESH: 1st innings 312				
SRI LANKA: 2nd innings 274 for 6 dec (Tharanga 115, Chandimal 50, Perera 33; Mehedi 2-77, Shakib 2-104)				
BANGLADESH: 2nd innings R/B4s/6s (overnight 67 for 0)				
Tamim c Gunaratne b Perera	19/55	1/0		
Soumya b Gunaratne	53/49	6/1		
Mominul lbw b Perera	5/15	1/0		
Mushfiqur c Dickwell				
b Sandakan	34/98	2/0		
Shakib c Karunaratne b Herath	8/12	1/0		
Mahmudullah lbw b Herath	0/2	0/0		
Liton c Tharanga b Herath	35/62	2/0		
Mehedi c Kumara b Herath	28/48	3/1		
Taskin c Mendis b Herath	5/13	0/0		
Mustafizur b Herath	0/5	0/0		
Subashis not out	0/5	0/0		
Extras: (b-1, lb-4, w-1, nb-4)	10			
Total: (All out in 60.2 overs)	197			
Fall of wickets	1-67, 2-80, 3-83, 4-104, 5-104, 6-158, 7-166, 8-180, 9-194, 10-197.			
Bowler	O	M	R	W
Lakmal	7	3	12	0
Perera	15	0	66	2
Herath	20.2	5	59	6
Gunaratne	6	1	16	1
Sandakan	9	0	29	1
Kumara	3	0	10	0
Result: Sri Lanka won by 259 runs and				

Milestone man credits bowlers

SPORTS REPORTER from Galle

It was a special day for Rangana Herath yesterday. He kept his record as Sri Lanka skipper at a 100 per cent in Tests, winning his third match in as many tries with the 259-run demolition of Bangladesh in the first Test at the Galle International Stadium yesterday. He had a lot to do with the win, taking a six-for on the final day, his 29th five-wicket haul.

On top of that, when he dismissed Liton Das for his third wicket and 363rd career scalp, he went past former New Zealand left-arm spinner Daniel Vettori to hold the record for the most wickets by a left-arm spinner in Tests.

"It's very important to get a good start in any series," he said at the end-of-day press conference yesterday. "We are happy with what we did. Hopefully the winning mindset will carry on to the second Test as well."

Instead of the Bangladesh batsmen's implosion on the final day when they lost all 10 wickets for 130 runs, Herath chose to credit his bowlers for the result.

"The bowlers bowled really well.

You can't take credit away from them. Even though the wicket did not offer much, they bowled really well and that's why we got the rewards."

Like Bangladesh skipper Mushfiqur Rahim, Herath also said that there was not much in the wicket. "There's not much for the spinners. I thought maybe there would be something on the final day, but it looks a good wicket still.

"They had got off to a good start, scoring 67 for the first wicket. In Galle on the final day, they were batting in the fourth innings so naturally they would have been under pressure. I had a lot of faith in Lakshan [Sandakan] and Dilruwan [Perera]. 450 is not an easy target so I had a lot of belief."

On his own milestone, Herath said: "Very pleased. I have been playing the attacking role as a spinner and while doing that I am glad to have achieved that milestone. I would like to thank all my friends, family, coaches and all."

"If I can get that, that will be great," he said when asked about the possibility of getting 400 wickets. "Only a few legends of the game have taken 400 Test wickets. So that will be great. I don't know if I will have this form always. I am looking forward to doing my job for the team."

MOST SUCCESSFUL LEFT-ARMERS

PLAYER	MAT	WKTS	BBM	5-WKTS	10-WKTS
Rangana Herath (SL)	79	366	14/184	29	7
Daniel Vettori (ICC/NZ)	113	362	12/149	20	3
Derek Underwood (ENG)	86	297	13/71	17	6
Bishan Bedi (INDIA)	67	266	10/194	14	1
Tony Lock (ENG)	49	174	11/48	9	3



Rangana Herath will certainly keep the ball in his trophy cabinet not only because he took six Bangladesh second-innings wickets with it, but also for overtaking Daniel Vettori as the leading left-arm slow bowler with a staggering 366 wickets.

PHOTO: AFP

Rule changes won't be an issue: Warner

AGENCIES, Brisbane

Australia batsman David Warner is confident that that new bat size restrictions imposed by the Marylebone Cricket Club will not have any major impact and it will just be a matter of getting used to the changes.

Warner's current T20 bat, the beefiest in his armoury, has a maximum depth of 85mm, 18mm more than the new laws permit. However, Warner is unconcerned by the looming changes that are set to affect a host of batsmen around the world.

"We're just going to have to adapt to the changes," Warner said on Saturday. "The ball will still go the same distance, still go to the fence, we'll still get our ones and twos. The odd nick might not carry this time."

While the changes will be implemented in October of this year, Warner has already been in touch with his manufacturer.

MOMENTS

SPORTS REPORTER from Galle

THE ACCIDENTAL MASTERSTROKE

On the fourth evening Soumya Sarkar was going great guns, attacking everything Sri Lanka had to offer.

With the score on 67, Rangana Herath turned to Asela Gunaratne, a bowler who had not featured in nearly 100 overs of play during Bangladesh's first innings.

He showed why with a no-ball first ball, after which the umpires decided to come off for bad light and play was called off. This meant that on the fifth morning, Herath would have to start with him. Off the second ball, Soumya was bowled by an off-break and what was a hail-Mary pass on the fourth evening became a masterstroke on the fifth morning. Herath later admitted that he had no intention of making that play. "Actually, last evening we stopped while he was bowling. So there was no other option but to go with him. If I had the option, I would have started with someone else."

THE OPTIMISTIC REVIEW

Stories abound of England's 19th century legend WG Grace's gamesmanship when at the crease. It is rumoured that in a first-class match, Dr. Grace had once been clean bowled, but he gruffly ordered the rest of the players to stuff the appeal and carried on batting, saying that the crowd had not come to watch them bowl but to see him bat. Whether that is true or not, the cameras caught Soumya actually outdoing Grace yesterday.

After he was bowled, he looked back at the bail-less stumps, turned around, and signalled for a review. The umpire of course told him that he could not review after being comprehensively castled, and Soumya walked off. Mushfiqur Rahim later said that Soumya thought he was given caught behind, but why let facts get in the way of a good story.